

Mc Dougall's Good Stories for Children

A WIZARD, A SMALL BOY, A MAGIC BUREAU, A CROSS FATHER AND A TRIP TO A LAND WHERE THERE ARE NO CHILDREN AND EVERYBODY IS VERY OLD AND CROSS AND CRABBED

ERWIN SCOTT'S father was not an old man although he seemed so to his son.

He was a cross-grained person who hated children and could not bear to have them around him at any time. He saw no use in small boys or girls and wondered why we were not born grown up and past all foolishness such as play and noise. He was so grave and stern that Erwin rarely even looked at him, for it gave the boy an unpleasant feeling to see those cold, gray eyes fixed upon him in disapproval of a merry smile or a boyish whoop of keen joy. Thus Erwin, while he really loved his father, as all boys should do, never had any feeling of companionship with him and never by any means sought to be with him. In fact, he tried to keep as far away from him as he could and that pleased his father, for the company of a boy made him nervous and crosser than ever.

So Erwin used to wander about town, down by the river and out in the suburbs after school, instead of going home. He became acquainted with many out-of-the-way places that very few in the city knew about. But one day he came to a secluded corner that he had never visited. It was a windy afternoon and the dust was blowing in clouds, leaves were falling and sweeping along, shutters were slamming, windows were rattling and skirts were flapping. Suddenly Erwin's hat flew off and over a fence. After it went the boy and he found himself in a tiny garden. He picked up his hat and as he placed it firmly on his head something fell to the ground beside him.

It was a small toy bureau, made of some reddish wood, with two drawers and brass handles. He picked it up, and while he was examining it a voice from a second-story window called to him:

"Please bring it up to me, little boy, and I will give you a nickel!" Erwin glanced up and saw a thin, pale face looking down upon him and a pair of sharp, fierce eyes boring into him, eyes that seemed to be lighted up by a red glare; but that might have been the reflection of the scarlet whiskers that framed the pale face.

"Come, hasten, boy; I am in a hurry!" added the man, beckoning with a long, crooked forefinger.

Erwin, thinking that it would be earning a nickel easily, and seeing a door before him, opened it to climb the stairs to the room from which the man was peering. But a sight of the hall before him caused him to pause in doubt. There he saw a number of strange objects disposed along the wall that made him start in alarm and draw back. Suspended from the ceiling was a dried alligator, while stuffed cats, toads, bats, birds of queer shape, lizards, great crabs, wolves and tortoises were ranged in rows far back into the gloom of the hall, and all of them seemed to have fiery eyes that gleamed dully in the dusk.

This was an astonishing collection of creatures for a boy to come upon suddenly and it disconcerted Erwin. The wind, sweeping into the open door, caused the great alligator to swing to and fro and the feathers on a tall, crimson bird to wave slowly and softly, and even the wolf's tail moved a little. Then Erwin heard the man call again:

"Come! What are you doing there?"

He began to climb the stairs slowly.

Now, the man above, who was so eager to get his toy bureau back, was the famous wizard Gilligan, of whom you have heard, no doubt, and this little article of furniture was no other than the celebrated wishing-bureau once owned by Trismegistus, the Persian Magician, many centuries ago. It had passed through many hands, coming down to Gilligan from a Scotch conjuror named Hibal and was the most precious of his possessions.

The wind had carried it out of his window and the wizard, being ill made the fatal mistake of asking a small boy to bring his treasure to him, instead of going after it himself. He had already regretted his mistake, and was hastening down the stairs to get his toy bureau into his own hands again when Erwin stopped in the dark and said:

"Gee! I wish I was back home again! I don't like this place!"

Instantly, and without knowing how it had happened, he found himself standing in the dining-room at home with the bureau still in his hands and his astonished father glaring at him.

"Don't spring in here again like that! I can't stand it!" shouted Mr. Scott angrily, for he was really startled.

"I couldn't help it," replied Erwin, looking confusedly at his father. "I just came here, somehow! A minute ago I was clear over on the other side of town, and next thing I found myself here in the dining-room. I don't understand it at all!"

"Bosh and nonsense!" cried his father. "None of your childish fairy-tale sto me! What is that thing you have in your hands?"

"It's—I found it in the yard and—I'll bet this had something to do with it all. Maybe it's magic!" He stared curiously at the bureau.

"Idiot!" cried Mr. Scott; "Have you been drinking?" he asked, looking very hard at his son. "You have too much liberty! I'll see about finding a place for you so that you will work after school hours instead of running loose about town!"

Erwin was still staring at the toy bureau and trying to gather his wits when his father snatched it angrily from him and said:

"You go to bed at once without any supper! That will teach you to try to fool your father. As for this plaything, I will take care of it. What next, I wonder? Magic! I'll give you all the magic you want. To bed with you at once!"

Erwin, well knowing that his father would not hesitate to add a sharp blow to his commands, did not tarry, but flew upstairs, glad to be able to sit down and ponder upon the marvel that had happened. He was perfectly sure now that he had been carried by some magic power through the air, for his home was two miles from the garden where he had found the bureau. Whether, as was very probable, it was this piece of furniture or only the fact that he was perhaps in the home of a wizard, there could, of course, be no certainty; but the many wonderful things which were to be seen in the hall indicated a magician's residence. Erwin had read more than one description of such a house, and knew that wizards always surrounded themselves with these strange and curious articles, finding them useful in many ways in their conjuring business. In fact, upon reflection, the strange man himself looked more like a genuine wizard than any Erwin had ever seen in a theatre or in picture books.

He took off his clothes and crept into bed, resolved upon the morrow to thoroughly test the toy to see if it possessed the magic power that he suspected, but he never had another opportunity to make a wish and utilize the wishing bureau.

This is what happened:

Mr. Scott looked it over carefully, and even absent-mindedly opened one of the drawers as he reflected upon his son's feeble and silly excuse for so suddenly intruding upon him. Of course, a man as old and stern as he could have no sympathy for a boy's imagination, for that is what he concluded had induced his son to say that he had been whisked through the air to his home in a second of time.

"What folly and worse," he said, "it is deliberate falsehood! To think that a child of mine could say such a thing, even in fun! By Jove, I wish that I were in a land where children were not and never had been nor ever could be! That's what I wish!"



Mr. Scott Among the People of Senilia

The dark red walls of the dining room suddenly faded from sight; he experienced a sort of floating movement, a sensation of lifting that lasted but a moment; then he found himself standing in a street in broad daylight, holding the toy bureau in his hands, while men and women were hurrying past him without noticing him at all.

They wore faded, shabby old clothes, these men and women; were careless of attire and of hair, and each one seemed intent upon some quest, for they all bent their hard, cold eyes searchingly forward or glanced at one another keenly. Their hands, without exception, were hooked in a spasmodic, perpetual clutch like a hawk's talons and they all moved craftily like birds of prey.

Realizing that something very unusual had happened to him, and yet unwilling to admit that it could be magic, Mr. Scott decided to ask one of the passers-by to enlighten him, and, selecting a man who seemed less absorbed than the others, he said:

"I beg your pardon, but will you kindly tell me the name of this place?"

"This is Easy street!" snapped the man, who certainly proved to be much crosser than he looked. "Read the sign-boards if you are lost!"

"I—er—I mean, what's the name of the country?" hesitatingly stammered Mr. Scott. "I fear that I am lost." "Name of the country! Good lands!" cried the man, examining Mr. Scott cautiously and somewhat fearfully, too. "Are you crazy? Don't you know that you're in Senilia—the blessed land of octogenarians, the land of Hare and Hold?"

"Why, how did I get here?" gasped Mr. Scott vaguely.

"What! Do you think that I have time to stand here answering fool inquiries?" roared the old man in a rage. "Pay me for the minute and a half that I've wasted on you already. Come, give up twenty cents!"

Mr. Scott, awed by his manner, handed him two dimes and he hastened away, shaking his gray head. Erwin's father was somewhat timid about making any more inquiries, but he felt that he must discover where he was. He had a dim notion down in his heart that magic was at the bottom of his situation, but he never suspected the bureau. He accosted another man a few steps further on.

"Sir," he said, "will you direct me to a hotel?"

"For five cents," replied this man, holding out his hand. "I do nothing for less." When he had received the money he showed a small inn to Mr. Scott and passed on. The inn was but a few steps away, and Mr. Scott entered to find an old man keenly watching just inside its door.

"Rooms are \$5 per day now," snapped the innkeeper; "I am getting tired of this business when I see how easy it is for other people to just pick up money. Want a room?"

Now Mr. Scott happened to have only \$10 in his pocket, and yet he felt that he must have a habitation in this strange land of Senilia. He answered that he desired a room.

"Then pay in advance!" snarled the innkeeper. "I trust no man, least of all one with a face as pleasant as yours, for it's treacherous."

Amazed to have the man consider his face pleasant, for he had always known it to be stern and severe, Mr. Scott handed him \$5 and was shown to his room.

"What are you carrying that thing around for?" asked the innkeeper, pointing to the bureau. "I furnish the rooms well enough."

"It belongs to my son," stammered Mr. Scott.

"What! Your son! Where did you come from?" shouted the man. "Such a thing is absolutely unheard of!" Staring at Mr. Scott, the innkeeper called loudly for his neighbors to come and see a man who had a son, and the inn was soon filled with curious, sour-faced men and women, who asked the stranger all manner of questions.

It was soon made plain to him that here in Senilia were no children at all, nor had there ever been any. The inhabitants remembered no past beyond the time when they were old people; they had always been gray, wrinkled, cross and suspicious. Not one of them had ever seen a child, nor had they more than a very feeble conception of a child's appearance. When Mr. Scott asked them what amusements they had and how they employed their time when work was over, he was told that work was never over in Senilia, and that they did not know what he meant by the word amusement.

It was very late when they left him and he was very tired of asking and answering questions; but he had learned that he had come to just such a place as he had wished for, although he had actually forgotten about making the wish. Although the hour was late—nearly 10 o'clock, in fact—the sun still shone brightly, and the innkeeper, whose name was Scroggs, told him that thus the inhabitants had several more hours in which to toil and amass wealth, for that was all anybody lived for in this land. Everybody being very old, little sleep was necessary, and, in fact, he said, many people slept only for an hour.

It was strangely silent throughout the city when Mr. Scott rose in the early morning, but the streets were full of hurrying old men and women already, eagerly striving to amass more wealth, and he wandered about seeking to find some man whose face showed a little freedom from care, greed and avarice, but he found none. The doors were all tightly barred and the windows heavily shaded; in fact, it seemed as if all dreaded nothing so much as a burglar. When he stopped a man to ask a question he received a stony glare of suspicion and a rude answer or none at all.

He soon observed that he was followed by an old, feeble man, whose eye revealed a strange, eager interest, but when he accosted this man and asked him why he followed him the man merely said that he was curious to see one who had a child. This Mr. Scott was sure was an evasion, but it was all he could obtain. He realized that he must procure some work if he was to remain here, for his remaining \$5 would have to be paid to Mr. Scroggs that night. When he applied for a posi-

tion he was regarded with intense suspicion and asked how he got to Senilia. He never once thought of wishing himself away, as his son would have done, for he did not believe in magic, and, in fact, never even thought of it as a means of escape from his predicament. So that day passed and night came, and with it came the curious old man, who said he merely wished to make a call. His eyes roved about Mr. Scott's little room, and rested on the magic bureau, and then he asked what it might be meant for.

"It is only a toy that belongs to my son," said Mr. Scott. "I happened, quite by accident, to bring it with me when I came here."

"I will buy it of you," said the old man, taking it up and examining it with great interest. Mr. Scott asked him what he would give for it.

"Oh, about \$2," replied the man.

"It's certainly worth more than that," replied Mr. Scott, "even if it's only a toy." But he took it away from the old fellow, for there was an eager, hawk-like look in his eye and a tremor in his fingers that made him think there was something queer in his desire to own it, but even then he never imagined its true meaning. He was a pretty stupid man, was Erwin's father. I think that I hardly know a boy who would not have already divined what the bureau was and have been traveling all over by its magic aid long before this.

"Well, I will make you another offer," said the old man, grinning. "I will give you \$2 in cash and five you as a book-keeper at \$6 per week besides, and that's generous, for nobody ever hires anybody here. We do our own work always. It's far more economical, you know."

"I'll think about it," replied Mr. Scott. And that was all the old man could obtain from him, and he went away, after casting a covetous glance, a long, lingering glance, upon the magic bureau.

Had Mr. Scott followed him he would have seen him go to a cabinetmaker's shop and engaged the cabinetmaker to immediately construct for him a bureau exactly similar to Mr. Scott's, and he ordered him to complete it before night-fall. The old man was an amateur wizard; that is, he had studied the art, and, in fact, was in many ways quite an adept, and he had immediately seen in Mr. Scott's sudden and mysterious appearance in Senilia the evidence of magic of some sort, therefore he had at once endeavored to discover what it was. When he saw the bureau he remembered that such a one was described in the ancient books of the Black Art as belonging to the famous Trismegistus, of Persia, and he resolved to possess it, by fair means or foul.

This man's name was Kooms—Paracelsus Kooms—and his sole desire to be a wizard was merely to obtain gold. Gold in heaps, gold in chests and bags, meant happiness for Kooms, and he would commit any crime to obtain it, although he already had far more than a man could spend in a long lifetime. He sat around watching the door of the inn all the day, watching to see if Mr. Scott took the magic bureau out with him, and was rejoiced at last to see him go forth without it.

It was late in the afternoon, and Mr. Scott had determined to again seek for employment, for he felt that he would die in this silent, childless town unless he was at work at something or other. He missed the merry laughter, the gay shouts and even the quarreling voices of the boys and girls, the whistles and cat-calls that he was used to at home, and he would have given many dollars, had he possessed them, to hear just once a whole-souled yell from a boy's throat.

Toward evening he secured a position in a counting-house as cutter. The cutter has to separate coupons from bonds, and it is easy work, but grows very tiresome, as I well know, after a time. He was glad to get even this job, and returned to his hotel gleeful and elated.

Mr. Scroggs was sitting by the door and asked for his money at once. When Mr. Scott paid him he told him that he was only going to remain over night, as he had at last obtained employment.

"I thought you might be going to work for old Parry Kooms," said Scroggs, "for he was here waiting for you in your room for quite a while. He's just gone."

"He wants to buy my son's bureau," replied Mr. Scott, "and I guess I'll sell."

"If Kooms wants it it's worth a good deal more than he offers for it," said Scroggs. "I'll bet it's useful to him. He's a sort of a magician, although he's no good here, for it takes a better conjuror than he or any ever seen to conjure a red cent out of these Senilia people, let me tell you."

A sudden thought, dim and misty, struck Mr. Scott, and he went up to look at the bureau. It was slowly dawning on his mind that the little toy might have been the cause of his sudden journey, but he was still far from taking advantage of the thought. There it stood on the table just as he had left it, but had he inspected it carefully he would have seen that this bureau was newer and shinier than his own. Mr. Kooms had exchanged the newly-made one for the magic piece of toy furniture and had hours before vanished from Senilia very suddenly, but of this Mr. Scott was entirely ignorant. The innkeeper followed him up to his room and looked in at the door.

"It's there all right, eh?" he said. "I was afraid he'd made away with it, for he's not above any bad tricks. He's the worst about here, although they're all pretty bad. I'd be as bad as any were I not in the hotel business. You know that softens a man's feelings and makes him kindly and generous."

"Yes, I have heard so," replied Mr. Scott, taking up the bureau. "I was just wondering whether there might not be some magic power in this since you told me about Kooms being a magician. How do you suppose it works?"

"Haven't you had any experience with it yourself?" asked Scroggs.

"No," said Mr. Scott. Then, suddenly remembering, he added: "At least, none that I was conscious of. I did make a fool sort of wish about wanting to get where there were no children, but of course—"

MR. SCOTT'S WONDERFUL JOURNEY AND THE AMAZING CHANGE IT MADE IN HIM—WHILE THE CHILDREN FEARED HIM BEFORE, NOW HE IS THEIR BEST FRIEND AND PLAYMATE

"Well, it came true all right, didn't it? Here you are!" said Mr. Scroggs. "What more do you want?"

Mr. Scott was staring in a dazed way at the bureau.

"Try it again," said the innkeeper. "If it worked once it will again. Make a wish and see what happens. That's easy enough."

Mr. Scott fumbled the toy and then said:

"I wish that I were home again!"

Nothing happened, although both looked around somewhat apprehensively, and in his intense disappointment Mr. Scott suddenly remembered how swiftly his journey had followed the first wish that he had made and he felt that he had failed.

"I'm sure it worked all right the other night, and in a minute, too," said Mr. Scott, regretfully, for he now realized what he had lost by his neglect, for, of course, he naturally thought that in some manner the magic power had leaked out or had been dispelled from the toy. He tossed the bureau into the corner and said:

"That settles it! Now I see what a fool I was when I sent Erwin to bed without listening to his story."

Mr. Scroggs asked him to explain, and when he heard the tale, he said:

"Serve you good and right! Any man who has a son like that and would send him to bed because he said he had been carried over the town by a magic bureau deserves to suffer right here in childless Senilia for the rest of his life! I can't give you any sympathy—unless you pay for it," he added. Then he got up and kicked the bureau across the room and went downstairs.

Thoughts of Europe, of China and Japan, of every beautiful place of which he had ever read, swept through his brain, and he was so vexed that he could not go to sleep. Outside he heard the old men wrangling in the street, late as it was, over their bargains and deals, and nowhere in all the city one mother's low lullaby over a sleeping child! How he would have liked to hear a baby cry just once! He sat there until morning came, and with it came Mr. Scroggs to inform him that he could have the room only until 3 o'clock unless he gave up another five—but he didn't care, for his heart was too full to feel another pang. After breakfast, which in Senilia is always merely a dish of oatmeal without either sugar, milk or butter—for there are no cakes or crullers, or, in fact, any of the good things that you have at home, in that dreadful haunt of aged beings—he went to the counting-house where he had been engaged as a coupon cutter and went to work.

He was very tired and sad. His fingers, and especially his thumb, hurt, for the scissors were badly made and the paper had twice cut his skin. Suddenly, without a warning, there stood Erwin beside him!

Mr. Scott dropped the scissors and rubbed his eyes, for he thought that he must have fallen asleep and was dreaming, but still there stood his son smiling at him and, lo and behold, he held the bureau in his hands!

"Well, here I am, father," said Erwin, and all the other cutters looked up and stared to see a boy in that well-barred room.

"Here I am, and I've come for you."

"How did you get here?" cried the father in faltering tones.

"And how did you learn where I was?"

"This did it," said Erwin, smiling and patting the bureau.

"Anything you ask and you get it," he added. "I merely wished to be where you were, and in a jiffy I found myself here, just as you came."

"And can we get away? Will it work this time? It failed me," cried his father.

"This is not the same. The one that failed was an imitation that old Kooms substituted. There's no deception about this one, however, and we can get away the minute we wish," said Erwin, smiling. "I guess the next time you'll believe me when I tell you anything."

"Don't be hard on me," said his father. "Don't rub it in. I saw it too late."

"Well, do you want to go at once?" asked Erwin.

"In a moment," replied Mr. Scott. "I merely wish to explain my departure to Mr. Sheekels, the bondholder, so that he will not think that I was taking advantage of him."

But Mr. Sheekels, who was the richest man in Senilia, had already entered the grated room, angry at hearing his men talking instead of cutting coupons, and he was enraged to see a stranger there. When he had heard Mr. Scott's explanation he was mystified, but agreed to let him off, only he said he would fine him one dollar for losing time in talking with his son.

Mr. Sheekels began to call for the police, and as help rushed in Erwin whispered, seizing his father's arm:

"I wish we were home in our own dining room." Instantly the scene changed and there they stood at home. Mr. Scott pinched himself, looked at the bureau and then laughed, the first laugh Erwin had ever heard him utter. Then he looked out of the window and shouted in amazement:

"Why, bless my soul! There's old Kooms out there in the yard! How did he get here?"

"Just the same as we did; by the aid of the bureau after he has swiped it," replied Erwin.

"Tell me all about it," said his father.

"Well, there's not much to tell. It seems that as soon as Kooms got the bureau he wished to be right over the spot where he could find a gold mine, and, strange to say, he landed the very next minute right in our back yard."

"Is there a gold mine in our yard?" cried Mr. Scott.

"Of course, or else he never would have landed here. I saw him and went out. He asked me what I would take for this land, and I told him that it was yours, but that you were away. Then I saw the bureau and I just guessed what had happened, so I tripped him up before he thought and grabbed it. He begged me to return it, but I'm a man; I can't do that. He had done to you."

"Let's try it," said Mr. Scott, eagerly.

Just then the door bell rang and in came the wizard Gilligan.

He was very polite in requesting the return of his furniture, and Mr. Scott admitted that the courtesy was due him, but Erwin would only agree to return it when Gilligan promised on his part to take Kooms away with him and send him back to Senilia. This Gilligan said he would gladly do, and so Erwin handed him the bureau. He was very grateful, for I scarcely think he ever expected to get his toy again, and he went into the yard, where they saw him addressing Kooms very solemnly. In another second they both vanished, and as neither of them were ever seen again I suppose they both went to Senilia and still remain there.

Mr. Scott opened the gold mine and made an immense lot of money, but all that he makes he spends upon Erwin and his friends. Mr. Scott is now pronounced by every boy and girl in town to be the very nicest and most satisfactory grown man in the city. He spends most of his time in devising pleasant surprises for his little friends, buying them presents and making their lives enjoyable; and, in fact, it is rarely that you see him when he is not surrounded by a crowd of loving and enthusiastic admirers. He has a smile that seems perpetually coming right from his heart, and no matter how poor, ugly or dirty a child is, that child can have anything it needs instantly if Mr. Scott learns of its necessity. He built playhouses all over the city, as well as ball-grounds, picnic-grounds, boat-houses, candy-factories, cake-bakeries, soda-fountains and ice cream stands, and everything is free at these stands to any child that walks up and asks for anything.

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